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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [IV](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: FRENCH VIEWS ON PRETORIA

AGREEMENT, UNOCI

REF: A. STATE 54558 (NOTAL)

[B.](#) PARIS 2200 (NOTAL)

[C.](#) PARIS 2201 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Acting DCM Josiah Rosenblatt for reason 1.4. (b./d).

[¶1.](#) (C) SUMMARY: MFA DAS-equivalent for West Africa Foucher on April 20 reviewed developments in Cote d'Ivoire. South African President Mbeki's mediation efforts were a positive development but it remained to be seen how and whether Ivoirians would follow up to their advantage. Foucher said the GOF was concerned about two issues: eligibility for the presidential elections and disarming all parties to the current conflict. On UNOCI, Foucher thought there would be a second technical rollover of the mandate. France supported SYG Annan's call for increasing UNOCI by 1,200 and supported an additional increase of 2,000 beyond that; these increases would allow UNOCI to expand both in scope and tasks, which might include assisting in disarmament and providing security for elections. Foucher said that Gbagbo and Ouattara could defuse the eligibility issue by Gbagbo's agreeing to allow Ouattara to run and Ouattara's agreement not to do so once being named eligible, but Foucher wondered whether either trusted the other sufficiently to allow for such a development. Foucher said the GOF had no evidence indicating that arms were being clandestinely brought into Cote d'Ivoire from Burkina Faso. He noted that the one-year anniversary of French-Canadian journalist Kieffer's disappearance in Cote d'Ivoire has prompted new interest in the case, which the French judiciary is actively investigating. END SUMMARY.

[¶2.](#) (C) MFA DAS-equivalent Bruno Foucher met with Africa Watcher on April 20 to discuss several issues (septels). On Cote d'Ivoire, Foucher said that South African President Mbeki's efforts to mediate the crisis had been positive and yielded an opportunity for Cote d'Ivoire to move toward ending its turmoil. However, Foucher said it was important for Ivoirians to take concrete steps to move forward now that they had the chance to do so.

[¶3.](#) (C) Foucher noted two concerns. The first involved the elections eligibility issue, where Mbeki's recommendations had "put Gbagbo's feet to the fire." Foucher said that Gbagbo's wisest course would be to comply and to declare everyone eligible to run. Foucher cautioned, however, that Gbagbo was relatively inexperienced in dealing with political issues with an international scope. He might travel abroad, engage in serious discussions, and make certain commitments, as he had in this case, but once home, he was very much influenced by his entourage, whose sole interests were its own and not Cote d'Ivoire's larger interests. Foucher said that, faced with such pressures, Gbagbo might not live up to the commitments he had made in Pretoria.

[¶4.](#) (C) Foucher said the GOF's other concern involved disarmament. How would disarmament take place, and in what time frame, he wondered. He noted that setting target dates and the like might prove futile unless all parties agreed to disarm. Speaking more generally, Foucher said that the stage had been well set following the Mbeki-sponsored talks, and the proper political will seemed to exist. Foucher's concern was over whether the parties would now take the necessary steps to transform the current positive environment into meaningful action.

[¶5.](#) (C) On the issue of peacekeeping, Foucher referred to MFA A/S-equivalent Joubert's recent trip to the U.S. during which he discussed peacekeeping with UN and USG officials, including in Congress. Foucher said there would likely be another "technical" rollover of UNOCI following the expiration of the current mandate early in May. France favored augmentation of UNOCI, in keeping with SYG Annan's request in December for an increase of 1,200 peacekeepers. Foucher also said that France would support UNOCI's expansion by another 2,000 peacekeepers. These increases would allow the mission to expand in scope and also take on new tasks, such as possible roles in assisting in disarming the various camps and providing security for eventual elections, roles that Foucher said France would support for an expanded UNOCI.

[¶6.](#) (C) Foucher said the GOF was well aware of the possibility that the U.S. Congress might examine closely the need for UNOCI to be extended or expanded, which was one

reason Joubert discussed the issue with Congressional staff. He noted also that another rollover might prove useful in moving the next cycle of UNOCI expenses into the next U.S. fiscal year, which could make Congressional agreement easier to obtain. Joubert said that his talks on Capitol Hill went well, Foucher commented.

17. (C) When asked about Alassane Ouattara, Foucher said that the French had heard that Ouattara had indicated that he might not run for President even if Gbagbo were to accede to Mbeki's suggestion that those in Ouattara's position be allowed to run. Foucher said that such an arrangement might be a way of defusing the eligibility question without requiring either Ouattara or Gbagbo to lose face. However, Foucher said that arriving at such an arrangement would require both to trust that the other would not do a double-cross, and he was not certain that this was possible, given the past history between Ouattara and Gbagbo.

18. (S/NF) We described briefly our limited recent contact with Ouattara in connection with the delivery of the Secretary's letter to him, in response to his letter

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congratulating her on her appointment (reftels). When asked whether the GOF maintained contact with Ouattara, Foucher said that it did not. Asking that his comments be treated in confidence, Foucher (protect strictly) said that the reason the GOF did not maintain contact with Ouattara was President Chirac's disapproval of Ouattara's "wedding in Paris" to "la femme" of Houphouet-Boigny. Foucher repeated this comment when we asked whether we had understood him correctly. Foucher indicated that Chirac's views of Ouattara were such that no one in the MFA or the Presidency sought contact with Ouattara. Contact, he said, was maintained through "other channels" (NFI). (NOTE: Our research of open sources indicates that Ouattara's wife Dominique is French, has extensive political contacts and influence, and once managed some of Houphouet-Boigny's interests in France. There is no indication that Mrs. Ouattara was once married to Houphouet-Boigny. Thus it is not clear, based on Foucher's comment, whether Chirac disapproves of some aspect of Ouattara's relationship with Ouattara's wife because of a prior (non-marital) relationship she may have had with Houphouet-Boigny, of a relationship that Ouattara may have had with Houphouet-Boigny's widow, or of some other relationship among the parties. In contrast to what Foucher said about Ouattara's contacts with the GOF, we note the interview Ouattara gave to Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent (Jan 9-15, 2005, edition), in which Ouattara states that he has good relations with Chirac and frequent contact with Elysee Africa advisor Bonnecorse. END NOTE.)

19. (C) When asked about possible shipment of arms into Cote d'Ivoire from Burkina Faso, a subject we had discussed with him before, Foucher acknowledged that the GOF had had concerns about this subject. He said that he had conducted inquiries with various elements of the GOF and that, presently, there was no evidence that such trafficking was taking place. He said that he could not rule out that arms were being introduced from Burkina Faso, but said the GOF had no information that would confirm this.

10. (SBU) Foucher noted that the French media had focused on the one-year (April 16) anniversary of the disappearance in Cote d'Ivoire of French-Canadian journalist Guy-Andre Kieffer. The French judicial investigation of the case had produced considerable work for Foucher's office in terms of four sets of letters rogatory that the GOF had prepared at the investigating judge's direction for delivery to the GOCI, and in preparing responses to press inquiries. Foucher did not comment on the substance of the investigation but noted the independent nature of the French judiciary, which French judges protect strenuously enough that the MFA was often reluctant to provide even friendly intra-government advice on specific cases. Any intervention by a government agency, Foucher suggested, was interpreted as pressure or interference by the judiciary, and such was the case in the Kieffer affair. Foucher said that it was difficult to convince other governments of the independence French judges enjoyed, which made investigations involving other countries more complicated.

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